The Importance of Officer

My department is made up of approximately 100 sworn personnel who staff 5 stations. We have 3 shift battalion chiefs and 2 additional administrative chiefs- an EMS chief and a training chief. We have 18 shift captains as well as an EMS captain and a logistics captain. There are 9 engineers responsible for driving the ladders. Everyone else is certified to drive the engines. We have paramedics on our rescues and are responsible for transporting all patients as it is a one tiered system. Our minimum staffing is quite low. Engine 1 and Truck 5 have a captain, a driver, and a firefighter while the other engines only have a captain and a firefighter. Truck 1 has a driver and a firefighter minimum. Our rescues have a medic and a firefighter. All firefighters are EMT-Basics at the minimum. The department runs approximately 9000 calls per year.
The Importance of Officer Development Programs and How to Implement One

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The Importance of Officer

Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.
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Abstract

Many smaller departments across the United States do not have any type of officer development program in place to train their newly promoted officers. Often times, these new officers are left in charge of an engine company, ladder company, or a whole station without any formal training or idea of what exactly they are supposed to do. This puts the lives of firefighters and the lives of the community that the fire department is trying to protect at risk because of ignorance. The purpose of this research paper is to find out what different options there are for officer development programs, determine which style would best fit my departments needs, and to establish a quality officer development program with quality training, financial cost, and time in mind. Various fire departments with officer development programs already in place as well as the National Fire Academy's recommendations will used in determining the necessary components in a worthwhile training program. This research paper addresses the problems associated with not having an officer development program and provides recommendations for creating and implementing a new one for my fire department.
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Introduction

Mt fire department currently does not have any type of Officer Development Program in place to properly train, educate, and prepare newly promoted officers for their new jobs. It is not required to have taken the IFSTA Fire Officer I course in order to test for promotion. Officers are being promoted and are being charged with leading a crew of at least four personnel without knowing exactly what they are supposed to do during day to day station operations or how to manage small incidents, much less major fires or emergencies.

The purpose of this paper is to find ways in which other fire departments and organizations prepare new officers for their jobs. Ultimately, a recommendation will be made for a specific Fire Officer Development Program to be created for my fire department. The course content of the Fire Officer Development Program will be created based on fire departments that have programs already in place, organizations that make recommendations for curriculum, and articles written about what traits and knowledge base fire officers should require. The question addressed in this paper is not whether or not Officer Development Programs work properly, but rather it is a fact finding expedition to find how it is done elsewhere. Based on that information, a tailor made curriculum will be recommended for my department.
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**Background and Significance**

The city covers 104 square miles, much of which remains undeveloped. Originally, when the population of the city was very small, the fire department was a volunteer organization. Soon after, a Public Safety system was used and police, fire, and EMS were staffed by cross-trained personnel. As the population of the city grew, it was necessary to create police and fire divisions within the Department of Public Safety. This occurred in 2001. In 2007, the fire department split from the police department and became its own entity.

According to the U.S Census Bureau, the population of the city in 1980 was 9,985. The population growth has been extraordinary, with the population in 1990 being 32,551. In 2000 it was 51,765, and the most recent estimate by the city in 2008 being 80,000.

The Fire Department has also grown very quickly, although not nearly as fast as the city has grown. Since the department has not grown as fast as the city, there are major issues regarding very low staffing levels. Because of the quick growth, the department consists of mostly young personnel who do not have very many years of service. When promotional openings open, young personnel are promoted to officer positions. In a young department lacking experience and quality staffing, officers need to be trained extremely well in order for day to day operations and major incidents to run smoothly.

Despite the need for the training, no Officer Development Program has ever existed nor are there current plans to implement one, although the need is great. The department is small enough that lieutenants are not used. Instead, the ranking system begins at firefighter, then goes to engineer, then to captain, then to battalion chief. An engineer can promote to captain and be in charge of a station overnight. A firefighter can promote to engineer after two years of service.
with the department and can promote to captain after four years of service. A very young and inexperienced member can quickly rise through the ranks and be in charge of several fellow firefighters.

The process for promoting is also very straightforward. If eligible for testing based on years of experience, the firefighter or engineer simply submits a letter of intent to the department's chief. Then a promotional exam based on the IFSTA Fire Department Company Officer textbook is administered. The test is multiple choice. Whoever passes the test is invited for an interview with the fire chief, the deputy chief, the EMS chief, and the training chief. The interview also includes a fire scenario that the interviewee must take command of and run. Based on the scores from the written test and the interview, the members are ranked and eventually promoted as openings arise. After the testing process, there is little else done to prepare the new officers for their roles. The IFSTA Fire Officer I course is not required at any point nor is any other leadership course.

New officers are assigned to a station that in most cases houses an engine and a rescue unit. This means that the new officer is charge of a minimum of four firefighters. These firefighters look to the officer when they are unsure of what to do. First thing in the morning, the officer is expected to input staffing into the computer system and review the shift turnover and determine if any problems from the other shift can be solved. Training for the day is reviewed and planned. Emergency calls are run as they come out and then the officer inputs the reports into a computer database. The officer is the liaison between the battalion chief and the crew. Discipline is handled by the officer. This means that the officer needs to know what actions by the crew require disciplinary action and to what extent. When a member of the public calls the fire station, the officer generally takes the call and answers any questions, refers the caller to the
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proper member of the fire department, or schedules station tours. This means that the officer needs to know the answers to common questions or know how to find the answers, know who to refer people to in what situation, and how to schedule tours and know when the station is available for tours. The officer, in short, needs to know how to handle all day to day operations and situations that may arise throughout the course of a shift.

Literature Review

According to the "Fire Department Company Officer" text, "the transition from firefighter to company officer is perhaps the most important and potentially difficult change in your entire fire service career" (7). The company officer is no longer in submissive role in which the firefighter responds to commands. The officer is now the coach of the company and in some cases of the whole station. The officer is the "vital connecting link between the fire company and the rest of the organization" (7). The officer communicates with the chief officers for the firefighters and determines the course of actions on emergency incidents and in the fire station. The company officer is looked to for advice from the entire crew. When something unexpected occurs and the crew is confused, they come to the officer for a solution. The officer is charged with leading the crew, not falling into line and following. In many cases, the company officer is the incident commander for the beginning or entire duration of many emergencies. Training Chief Norman Ray of the Philadelphia Fire Department explains that new officers need to realize first that they no longer "one of the fellas". These new officers need to get used to being officers. They are responsible for their crews safety and for supervising the crew. To prepare their officers for these new challenges, Philadelphia Fire Department requires new lieutenants to attend 80 hours of class at the PFD fire academy.
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To meet the challenges of transitioning from a driver or firefighter to the role of a company officer, classes and texts have been prepared by various agencies and authors to better prepare new officers. One step in preparing for the role of company officer is to enroll in the IFSTA Fire Officer I course. This course gives a general overview of the new responsibilities of a company officer and is a good starting point when assuming the role of officer. The course covers many topics including the structure of fire departments, officers legal responsibilities, leadership, incident management, and action plan management. The State Fire Academy offers this course several times annually and the department also puts the class on throughout the year.

The Aurora, Colorado Fire Department has officer training programs in place for its new officers as well as aspiring officers from neighboring departments. The Acting Officer Program consists of five modules that must be completed before becoming an "acting officer". The modules are Incident Management and Scene Safety, Building Construction, Engine Company Operations, Truck Company Operations, and Emergency Scene Simulations. Once these classes are completed, the role of an acting officer can be assumed. Within Aurora, the acting officers do just that- act as the officer on an engine or ladder under the supervision of an experienced officer until cleared to be the only officer on board. Aurora also has an Officer Development Program that consists of Personnel Management, Advanced Strategy and Tactics, Leadership, Incident Management, Multi-Story/Commercial Operations, and Ethics courses. The program is two weeks long. This class is required for all new officers within Aurora Fire Department. The courses "explore various concepts related to supervision of personnel in both emergency and non-emergency settings".

Forest Park, OH Fire Department has an extensive officer development program in place. Along with the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association, Chief Trish Brooks helped develop the Maxwell
The Importance of Officer officer development program. The class is built around John Maxwell's book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. John Maxwell is an author and motivational speaker. The class covers respect, character traits, and trust, among other leadership topics. The class is available to Forest Park members, and has can be made available across the country upon request. The other program in place in Forest Park is an "officer boot camp". It is required of all newly promoted officers. The program consists of classes that cover entering EMS and fire reports into the computer system, grammar and spelling, disciplinary action and personnel evaluations, proper radio procedures, investigations and incident safety, interview techniques, and an incident command class. These classes cover what Forest Park Fire Department sees to be the necessary and essential tasks and information needed by an officer.

The Long Beach Fire Department in California offers simulations online and are also used for promotional testing. These simulations use real buildings from the Long Beach area and various fire scenarios are presented. A typical dispatch is given, as is some basic information such as weather conditions and time of day. Candidates can review an area map quickly as well. During the test, a video view from the "captains seat" is displayed on a computer screen that shows the drive from the station to the incident. This mimics the time an officer has to gather their thoughts while enroute to the call. The candidate is charged with "running" the incident as best as possible. Updates are given periodically by the test giver. These simulations are used to "develop thinking and decision making skills necessary for "the job" (safe and successful coordination and mitigation of emergency operations)" LBFD Training Center.
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The author noticed a problem with his department after reading several articles about officer development and realizing that his department had no such program. The problem became even more apparent after hearing officers in the department describe their first months as officers and the confusion that followed. A recent promotion of four officers made the author realize that something had to be done. The new officers were assigned to their stations with little idea of what to do next. To make matters worse, they were criticized for any mistakes they made and plenty of analyses were made about them and how they were performing.

Once a problem was defined, the issue became finding programs already in place to learn from. Several articles written by members of the field were read as well as some applied research papers. Other officer development programs from other fire departments were available online and were studied. Texts put out by the International Fire Service Training Association (ISFTA) were also studied as well as other text books regarding the job description and traits required of an officer. Lawrence Bennett referred the author to the Forest Park Fire Departments Chief, Chief Trish Brooks, who shared her departments extensive officer development program with the author. The problem is not a new problem, so a sufficient number of articles and sources were found. The author drew from several sources and from the structure and need of his own department to create a detailed officer development program that would suit his department.

One limitation the author noted was in proving that any of these development programs actually helped new officers do a better job. A class that teaches specific day to day tasks will be useful simply by providing the knowledge for an officer to do the job correctly. However, there
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is little proof to be found that supports the fact that an officer who takes a leadership class becomes a more effective leader, especially under pressure. Again, the knowledge provides a gateway for the new officer, but there is the thought that those who have not learned how to be an effective leader by the time they are ready to promote are not going to learn during a week long course. A class obviously cannot hurt the chances of improving leadership, but when looking at cost effectiveness, this lack of proof will prove to be an issue.

Recommendations

Based upon description and statements declaring the job as an officer to be one of the most difficult jobs in the fire service and stating that the transition to an officer is both incredibly important and difficult, the author strongly recommends that an officer development program be created and implemented for the my department as soon as possible. Many other fire departments have created programs to train their new officers and are proud of the results. In order to run a quality department, which means not only serving the public, but treating the employees fairly, the department needs to make an investment in the growth and training of its officers. New firefighters require a three month academy in order to join the ranks of the firefighters. A promotion to an officer is a new job that also needs to require a level of training before allowing new officers to join the ranks of the officers.

This author recommends several aspects from different fire department officer development programs for the new program. To even be allowed to test for promotion, the firefighter needs to have enrolled in and completed the IFSTA Fire Officer I course. This course is offered by the department occasionally and is offered several times a year by the State Fire
The Importance of Officer Academy. The department pays for the firefighter to attend the class at the State Fire Academy. This shows some initiative and desire to further ones learning. The department should not be trying to teach an officer basic required knowledge after the promotion.

The next step should be a testing process. The purpose of this paper is not to develop a testing process, so the current process will suffice. Once a list has been created ranking the applicants, tentative promotions may be made. From here, those selected enter the departments Officer Development Program.

The Officer Development Program begins with a review of the content of the IFSTA Fire Officer I course. Then the class begins to focus in on some of the specific tasks the department asks of their officers. The computer systems used by the department will be covered in depth. These systems are used to input daily staffing, write EMS reports, and fire reports. An incident command class will also be put on to teach the new officers the proper way to take command of an incident and ensure it runs as smoothly as possible. Radio communication will be reviewed, though the new officers should be familiar with proper usage due to the departments use of them. Discipline is another aspect to be covered in by this development program. The new officers need to know what warrants discipline and how to properly administer discipline. This means both the procedures outlined by the department but also how to counsel a firefighter who is in need of discipline. Specific discussion will focus on leadership and the departments code of ethics. These new officers should have a working knowledge of strategy and tactics, but since these new officers will be the ones their firefighters look to during fire suppression, they need an advanced class in strategy and tactics. Along with the strategy and tactics course, a building construction course directly related to the city will be taught. The city is a new community, so the building construction is unique and poses different problems. Lastly, if the department does
implement annual evaluations, the officers will need to trained in how to evaluate and communicate the evaluations to the firefighters.

The next step in the Officer Development Program is scenario based training. New officers will be presented with different fire scenarios and will be asked to "run" the scene with a typical assignment of apparatus. They will do these scenarios in the presence of experienced officers as well as in front of their fellow new officers. Once they "run" the scenario to the best of their ability, they will be critiqued by the new officers, and finally by the experienced officers. Each new officer will run several of these scenarios, with each one getting progressively harder. Different levels of fire involvement, different rescue situations, different building types, and different "X-factors" and problems will be encountered.

The last step before being assigned to a station and being put in charge of a crew will be to put each new officer into an "Acting Officer Program". This is similar to the departments FTO program that new firefighters go through. In the FTO program, new firefighters ride on the engines, trucks, and rescues and perform the tasks of a firefighter under the very close supervision of an officer. They do not count towards the staffing of the department during this period. The same situation will occur during the Acting Officer Program. Each new officer will be an acting engine captain under the supervision of an experienced officer. They will be in charge of all of the duties of the engine officer, including morning staffing, EMS and fire reports, any disciplinary needs, supervising the crews on any type of emergency run, and taking command of incidents, among other tasks.

Once this rigorous program is completed, the newly promoted officers are then finally assigned to an engine or truck company and are then put in charge of their crew and station. Of
The Importance of Officer course they will still be on probation as an officer for a year after promotion as policy dictates now. After the class, they will know what is expected of them on a day to day basis and have the knowledge to do those tasks. With this program in place, the department will eliminate the period of confusion and uncertainty that now comes with a promotion. There will still be mistakes made, but they will be less frequent and less severe, and therefore easily fixed.

Problems that arise will be dealt with as they come during the planning and implementation of the program and suggestions from fellow firefighters, drivers, paramedics, captains, and chiefs will be welcomed.
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http://www.census.gov/

Aurora Fire/EMS Training Bureau


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Philadelphia Fire Department Officer Development Program

http://www.firehouse.com/podcast/careers/philadelphia-fire-department-officer-development-program

Long Beach Fire Department Training Center

http://www.lbfdtraining.com/simulations.html